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The situation in the Middle East

Question of Palestine

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: assistance to the Palestinian people

Letter dated 7 January 2010 from Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Egypt to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the pleasure to transmit herewith a letter addressed to you from H.E. Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt, appraising the developments surrounding the Lifeline 3 convoy carrying humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people in Gaza, and its enclosures, including a list of medical and other humanitarian equipment and assistances Egypt has permitted lately to access Gaza (see annex).

I would kindly request that the present letter and its annex be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 15, 16 and 70 (b), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Soha **Gendi**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex to the letter dated 7 January 2010 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Egypt addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing to appraise you of developments surrounding the *Lifeline 3* convoy carrying humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people in Gaza.

You may recall that the Government of Egypt had instituted, in July 2009, a *mechanism* for receiving humanitarian aid convoys bound for Gaza. Numerous humanitarian convoys have operated in accordance with this *mechanism* since its inception and Egyptian authorities have been fully mobilized to afford them every form of assistance.

It is within this context that Egyptian authorities directed the organizers of the *Lifeline 3* convoy to abide by the existing *mechanism* which was in place, and which designates *El Arish* port as the sole point of entry for humanitarian relief arriving in Egyptian territory.

Despite the persistent disregard by the convoy's organizers of Egyptian rules and regulations, Egyptian authorities worked tirelessly to accommodate the convoy within the established framework of the existing *mechanism* for the reception of humanitarian relief convoys, as the attached fact sheet details. And while certain elements participating in the convoy have, upon arrival in Egyptian territory, resorted to unlawful acts of violence in their attempts to impose their demands on the Egyptian Government, Egyptian authorities have for their part acted with the utmost self-restraint.

Despite these unfortunate incidents, Egyptian authorities received the full convoy on the 3rd and 4th of January, in accordance with the existing *mechanism*, and allowed it to enter Gaza, on the 6th, via the *Rafah* border crossing, with the exception of a number of remaining vehicles that failed to meet the full requirements for entry and that have been instructed to fulfil these requirements in preparation for their subsequent entry into Gaza.

While Israel, as the occupying Power, bears primary responsibility for the prevailing humanitarian situation in Gaza, the Egyptian Government has been, and remains, fully committed (as the enclosures hereto demonstrate) to easing the humanitarian suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza, within the framework of the *mechanism* that it has instituted for this purpose.

(*Signed*) Ahmed **Aboul Gheit**
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Enclosure 1

FACTS
About the *Lifeline 3* Convoy

1. In July 2009, the relevant Egyptian authorities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Ministry of the Interior/General Intelligence Service) instituted an Egyptian *mechanism* for receiving humanitarian convoys bound for Gaza, and within the framework of this mechanism the port of *El Arish* was selected as the sole entry point for humanitarian relief. The mechanism was instituted after thousands of tons of assistance had previously arrived at different ports and caused severe administrative disruptions for different state authorities, especially when one considers the issue of customs clearances, and the fact that certain humanitarian deliveries had to be returned upon reception when found to be unfit for usage (due to expiration, previous usage ... etc.). *El Arish* is also the closest point to Gaza, in addition to its proximity to storage locations in *El Arish* city should the need to store certain supplies arise.

2. The relevant Egyptian authorities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Ministry of the Interior/General Intelligence Service) have been following reports of the preparations for the *Lifeline 3 Convoy* on the website of *Viva Palestina*, which is affiliated with British MP George Galloway. The Egyptian Embassy in London had, on 10 November 2009, conveyed a letter to Mr. Galloway informing him of the Egyptian *mechanism* for receiving humanitarian convoys to Gaza, which clearly mentioned the need for convoys to enter via *El Arish* port.

3. When the convoy departed London on 6 December 2009, neither the Egyptian Embassy in London nor the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had received any information from the organizers of the convoy regarding their plans. Moreover, the Embassy never received any response from the organizers regarding its letter to Mr. Galloway dated 10 November 2009.

4. After the departure of the convoy, the Embassy sent another letter to Mr. Galloway confirming the *mechanism* specified by the Egyptian Government and underscoring the necessity of the entry of the humanitarian relief supplies through *El Arish* port. Once again, the Embassy did not receive any response to its letter.

5. As a result of Mr. Galloway's disregard of its two letters, the Embassy in London took the initiative and contacted Mr. Galloway's office, for the third time, on 17 December, to reaffirm that the convoy should meticulously abide by the above-mentioned *mechanism* to receive humanitarian convoys. The Embassy requested from Mr. Galloway's office a list of names of participants in the convoy as well as a list of the relief supplies and assistance in the convoy. Until that date (11 days following the departure of the convoy), Mr. Galloway's office never provided this information. The Embassy received the required information on that day, and three days later received amendments to the list.

6. Upon instructions from Cairo, the Egyptian Embassy in London reaffirmed to Mr. Galloway, for the fourth time, that Egyptian authorities had agreed to grant the convoy access to Gaza, on the proposed date (27 December), on condition that the rules and regulations governing the entry of humanitarian convoys be strictly adhered to.

7. In spite of Egypt's repeated stipulations, Mr. Galloway persisted in disregarding the relevant regulations, directing the convoy through Jordan, which then proceeded south to the port of *Aqaba*, so as to enter Egypt through the port of *Nuweiba*, in contravention of the aforementioned Egyptian *mechanism*.

8. Consequently, and due to the organizer's insistence on imposing the *status quo*, Egypt declared that it would refuse entry of the convoy except from *El Arish*, which was subsequently conveyed to Mr. Galloway through the Egyptian Consulate in *Aqaba*.

9. Having discovered that Mr. Galloway had deliberately concealed the existence of such an Egyptian *mechanism*, the Turkish authorities intervened on behalf of the Turkish participants in the convoy, whose share constituted the majority of the humanitarian aid, to seek with Egyptian authorities the most suitable means of accomplishing the convoy's mission. Egypt reiterated the importance of adhering to the aforementioned *mechanism*, particularly since it was made known to the organizers a month prior to launching the convoy. As such, the Turkish coordinator took the decision to return to the Syrian port of *Lattakia* so that the convoy could then proceed to *El Arish*.

10. As soon as the convoy announced it would head to *El Arish*, Egypt granted it exceptional facilities. The Egyptian authorities also granted permission for all the humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip.

11. However, as soon as the convoy arrived to *El Arish* on 3 and 4 January, the Egyptian authorities were surprised to find that the convoy included 59 cars (saloon) of no humanitarian use, and carrying no humanitarian supplies. The Egyptian authorities had not been notified that the convoy would include such cars. Moreover, they had informed the participants that all vehicles carrying humanitarian supplies would have priority of entry. The Egyptian authorities therefore had no choice, with respect to the aforementioned 59 cars, but to apply the laws and regulations governing the entry of non-humanitarian goods to the Gaza Strip.

12. Some of the convoy's spokespersons claimed that there was a written agreement between the Egyptian Consul in *Aqaba* and the convoy's organizers, by virtue of which the whole convoy, including all vehicles, had been granted permission to enter through the Rafah crossing. However, such claims are categorically untrue.

13. In the meantime, Mr. Galloway had provoked a number of the convoy's participants, who publicly declared that his intention had been to trigger this crisis in retaliation for the Egyptian authorities' refusal to grant the convoy access from Nuweiba (bearing in mind that the organizers had been informed months earlier that the designated point of entry was the port of *El Arish*). Mr. Galloway and a number of participants also threatened to set fire to the 59 cars.

14. On the evening of 5 January, a number of participants started attacking members of the Egyptian security forces with stones, as well as vandalizing part of the port's infrastructure, forcing the security forces to intervene. The clashes resulted in a number of casualties on both sides.

15. As soon as order was restored, the convoy was allowed to enter the Gaza Strip on 6 January, with the exception of the 59 cars which had to undergo the standard procedures for non-humanitarian goods.

16. It is important to note that Egypt cooperated with Mr. Galloway on two previous humanitarian aid convoys to Gaza, namely the first *Lifeline for Gaza* convoy in March 2009, and the second in mid-July 2009.

Enclosure 2

The sum of medical and other humanitarian equipment that Egypt allowed access to Gaza from 29 December 2008 until 28 December 2009

The aid that entered the Gaza Strip through Rafah crossing:

- 7,911.628 tons of medicine
- 15,679 blood packs
- 224 ambulances
- 4 refrigerators for preserving blood packs
- 194 vehicles to be used as mobile clinics
- 7 electricity generators
- Hundreds of tons of medical and humanitarian equipment

- Aid convoys: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Turkey, Algeria, Sudan, Tunisia, Russia, Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan, Sultanate of Oman, Yemen, Indonesia, South Africa, Morocco, Malaysia, Venezuela, Ireland, Bahrain, France, United Arab Emirates, Switzerland, Canada, Islamic Organization of Europe, the Arab Parliament
- Lifeline convoys 1 and 2
- Convoy of Hope
- Miles of Smiles Convoy

The aid that entered the Gaza Strip through other crossings (Karam Abou Salem and Awaga):

- 6,280 tons of food
- One million mineral water bottles
- A well-provisioned school comprised of 11 classrooms, 2 bathrooms and 55,000 school bags
- Hundreds of tons of humanitarian equipment
- Aid convoys: Egyptian National Party and the Egyptian Red Crescent, Libya, Turkey, Bahrain, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, Kuwait, Switzerland, Japan and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Note: Egypt has dedicated the Arish maritime port and seaport for the receiving of humanitarian and medical aid equipment and materials from around the world.